

MADRINA PROJECT
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
Division of Child Support

SIP Grant #90F10040/01: Awarded \$150,000.
Project Period: March 1, 2001 thru September 30, 2002
Date of Report: October 31, 2002

Overview of Madrina Project

The Yakima office of the State Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Child Support (DCS), began setting up the infrastructure for the OCSE funded project in March 2001 upon learning of the successful outcome of the Special Improvement Project (SIP) grant application. The Yakima DCS office applied for SIP funding because of the need to provide more accessible, more culturally relevant services to the significant proportion of Hispanic community members that live within the catchment area. The geographic area involved is rural (eastern Washington valley of approximately 40 miles by 20 miles) experiencing a large increase in its Hispanic population (farm workers and related industries, as well as seasonal and migrant workers) in Yakima and eight small communities. This population in Yakima County had increased from about 30% in 1990 to over 43% in 1998. These families are often of limited English proficiency (largely Mexican decent), and are experiencing profound social, cultural, and economical transitions. The language barrier, low income, and the technicalities of the child support enforcement system required significant outreach efforts to build trust with this different culture and in dispersed communities.

The Yakima DCS Regional Administrator, Connie Ambrose, assigned supervisor Sylvia Flores on a full-time basis to coordinate and implement the project. Program Administrator Stephanie Wise was assigned on a quarter-time basis to serve as grant manager. She was responsible for monitoring expenditures, preparing reports, and attending to other fiscal and technical aspects of managing the grant. The Regional Administrator provided oversight and support to the grant implementation also. As reflected in quarterly reports provided to OCSE/ACF, with noted exceptions, the implementation of grant activities proceeded as planned in the grant proposal. Over 50 presentations to community, faith-based, human services, and cultural organizations and groups were provided within the first three months of the project as the Yakima community was informed about the project.

While recruiting existing community leaders (Madrinas) to serve as the core strategy of the project, simultaneously information was provided and access increased to child support and other related social services. The role of "Madrinas" is that of godparents within Hispanic culture. This team of volunteers represents already highly respected members of their communities. The fourteen volunteers were selected through an extensive, thorough application process based on their qualifications.

Training

Upon selection of volunteers, an extensive training period took place. All presentations and materials were also provided in Spanish. Over 100 hours of training was provided and included:

- the child support enforcement system and services provided;
- disclosure and confidentiality policies;
- parental rights and obligations;
- dispute resolution (mediation, phone conciliation, meeting facilitation, negotiation, etc.);

- enforcement and role of the courts;
- notary public certification
- working with interpreters

Seven volunteers received an additional forty hours of specialized family mediation training. The basic mediation course attended by seven volunteers involved 40 hours of training and approximately 100 hours of internship over the next 12 months preparing for examination and certification. Choosing to participate in the intensive process of mediation certification is indicative of the motivation and discipline of the volunteers. All of the volunteers are employed outside the home and have families, in addition to other commitments to community and church organizations.

Media Campaign

An extensive media campaign occurred throughout the implementation of the project. In addition to newspaper and newsletter articles, interviews with the project coordinator and Madrinas were presented by local television news stations and by the local Spanish language radio station. The radio station also provided ongoing public service announcements in Spanish describing the new project and outreach efforts by Yakima Division of Child Support.

Volunteer Outreach

Throughout the project implementation, the Madrinas appeared with the project coordinator at community activities, events, and public forums to discuss child support processes and develop referrals for services. Presentations were made at local celebrations such as Cinco de Mayo, at other community and church events, and in public forums held in small rural communities in the Yakima Valley. Volunteers answered questions, gave people educational materials in Spanish, and made referrals to child support services when appropriate.

Summary of Results

This project has clearly demonstrated a significant increase in the level of awareness, involvement, and support for the child support enforcement program by the targeted Hispanic community. Access to these services has been improved, and the State Division of Child Support has identified the barriers to reaching this community with our services.

Identified Barriers

Our work during this project has led us to understand more clearly the barriers in reaching the Hispanic community of the Yakima Valley. Barriers include:

- the stigma of receiving public services,
- fear of government agencies, especially for undocumented immigrants,
- language barriers, and
- cultural reluctance to request assistance

The prior history for Yakima DCS was that the Hispanic community saw child support enforcement as adversarial rather than providing assistance. The bilingual design for the outreach activities of the entire project has been effective, as well as the efforts to build a trusting relationship with this community. See also Strengths/Successes discussed below.

The child support enforcement services now have a strong outreach presence in the Hispanic community with the advertising and the team of trained volunteers.

The successes of this project have also provided a more effective link for Hispanic families to other community service organizations. This benefit derives as Madrinas - respected members of the Hispanic community – make referrals to services. They are trusted resources. The Madrina Project has presented the positive side of child support. Overall outcomes from this Special Improvement Project and "Best Practices" have been shared broadly with services providers nationwide. This project has already been featured in national child support enforcement professional conferences, including presentations by Sylvia Flores, Project Manager, in workshops related to improving customer services for communities with language and diversity issues. Outreach and other materials developed by this project is available from OCSE, DOSS.

Strengths/Successes:

1. Positive public relations and community collaboration – Yakima DCS recruited a high number of interested volunteers in order to screen, interview, and select the most viable candidates. In the recruitment/start-up phase of the project, community education was provided to agencies, community groups and faith-based organizations about child support.
2. Increased capacity in Hispanic community to access child support services and educate the community about child support services – a total of fourteen Madrina Project volunteers were selected. Each one continues to be actively involved with the project. They make direct referrals to DCS, educate their family members, friends, and neighbors about child support services.
3. Continued education of DCS Headquarters staff and local office staff of needs of Hispanic community . Ongoing reports and updates to DSHS staff resulted in increased understanding throughout Washington State of needs and Best Practices in serving Hispanic communities.
4. A total of three videos have been created regarding the Madrina Project. Two of the videos are intended to show at presentations to describe and highlight the goals and activities of the Madrina Project. The third video is a Spanish language video intended to be used by DCS staff and to use as outreach materials to Hispanic community members by staff, volunteers, and community groups.
5. Increased child support referrals and collections from Hispanic community. As referenced in the section “Evaluation – Child Support Outcomes”, Yakima DCS tracked monthly statistics of cases in the Yakima Field Office related to collection, paternity establishment, number of Hispanic children receiving child support, monthly ordered amount paid, etc. We are increasing the numbers of Hispanic families receiving child support services.

Issues:

1. Projection of timeline – Setting up the project’s infrastructure, reassigning the project coordinator’s previous duties and establishing a part-time position for the grant manager and recruiting the best qualified volunteer candidates took more time than anticipated.
2. Misconceptions about DCS in the Hispanic community – Issues regarding citizenship requirements, language issues, immigration issues, fear of dealing with government agency, agency forms/notices not easily understood.
3. DSHS Policy regarding criminal background checks for DSHS staff and agency volunteers. DCS determined that staff and volunteers do not have unsupervised access to children and vulnerable adults thus not required undergoing a criminal background check.
4. Delay in projected timeline – Due to late start time and length of training provided the volunteers the public events at which volunteers would be present started in December,

2001 which is a later date than originally projected.

Project Evaluation Results

Child Support Referrals

Cases were referred to the Division of Child Support specifically to the Madrina Project for direct services. The sources of these referrals were staff from the Yakima office of the Division of Child Support, Madrinas and Padrinos of the Madrina Project, Community Service Offices (public assistance offices) in the Yakima Valley, the Dispute Resolution Center of Yakima and Kittitas Counties, KDNA-FM (a public educational Spanish language radio station), Amigas Unidas (Consejo Referral Services that works with victims of domestic violence), Yakima Interfaith Coalition, La Casa Hogar (members of numerous local churches established La Casa Hogar to provide educational and emergency services to women and children), Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic, private attorneys, Central Washington Catholic Diocese and the Yakima School District.

From April, 2001 through September, 2002 the Madrina Project provided 24 non-assistance Spanish applications for DCS services upon the clients' request. Client requests were received by phone or in person.

- ✓ Of the 24 new applications 16 were returned by the clients and opened as new non-assistance cases.
- ✓ Of the 16 cases most have a child support order established and collection actions have been taken. The average child support obligation is \$300.60 per month for these cases
- ✓ Of the 16 cases 3 are medical assistance type of cases, 12 are strictly non-assistance and 1 is closed as the parties reconciled.
- ✓ Of the 16 cases 15 are Limited English Speaking, Spanish only (8 cases both parties were LEP and 6 cases one of the parties is LEP), 1 case both parties spoke English.

Parts of the services provided by the Madrina Project were family mediation services referrals to the Dispute Resolution Center of Yakima and Kittitas Counties (DRC).

- ✓ 9 cases were referred to the DRC.
- ✓ 2 of the 9 referrals were not Division of Child Support cases.
- ✓ 1 case indicates the custodial parent refused family mediation services.

Of the 9 referrals 5 cases have regular, consistent monthly payments for current/future support plus a payment for the arrearage. 1 case has sporadic payments and 1 case has no payments since the year 2000.

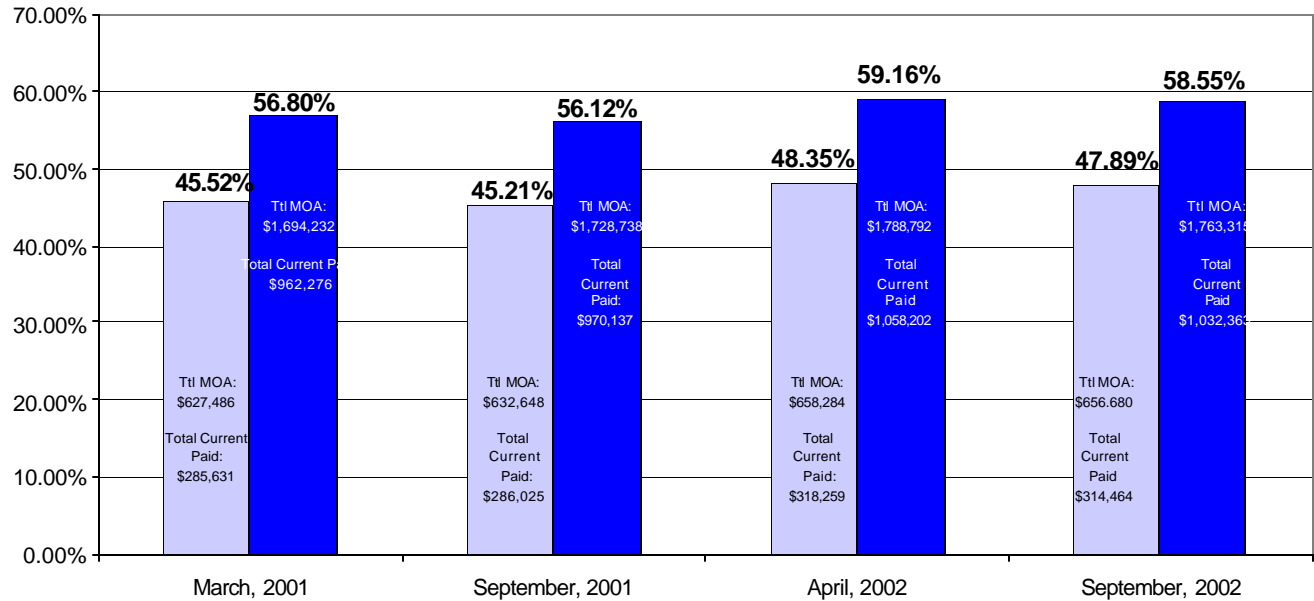
Client Contacts

The Madrina Project received a total of 140 client contacts during the 19-month period. The Madrina Project Coordinator principally attended these contacts. 83 of them were custodial parents and 57 were non-custodial parents. Client contacts ranged from explanations of the establishment and collection process to referrals to other social service agencies.

Quarterly Paternity/Collection Results

	March, 2001	September, 2001	April, 2002	September, 2002
Hispanic NCPs Paternity Ratio	83.93%	84.09%	83.60%	84.07%
Non-Hispanic NCPs Paternity Ratio	83.23%	83.27%	82.11%	83.25%
Hispanic NCPs % of Current Support Paid	March, 2001 45.52%	September, 2001 45.21%	April, 2002 48.35%	September, 2002 47.89%
Non-Hispanic NCPs % of Current Support Paid	56.80%	56.12%	59.16%	58.55%
Hispanic NCPs Total Non-IRS Collections	March, 2001 \$420,965.00	September, 2001 \$405,717.14	April, 2002 \$454,588.00	September, 2002 \$456,313.37
Non-Hispanic NCPs Total Non-IRS Collections	\$1,322,810.00	\$1,304,919.97	\$1,448,803.00	\$1,385,891.04

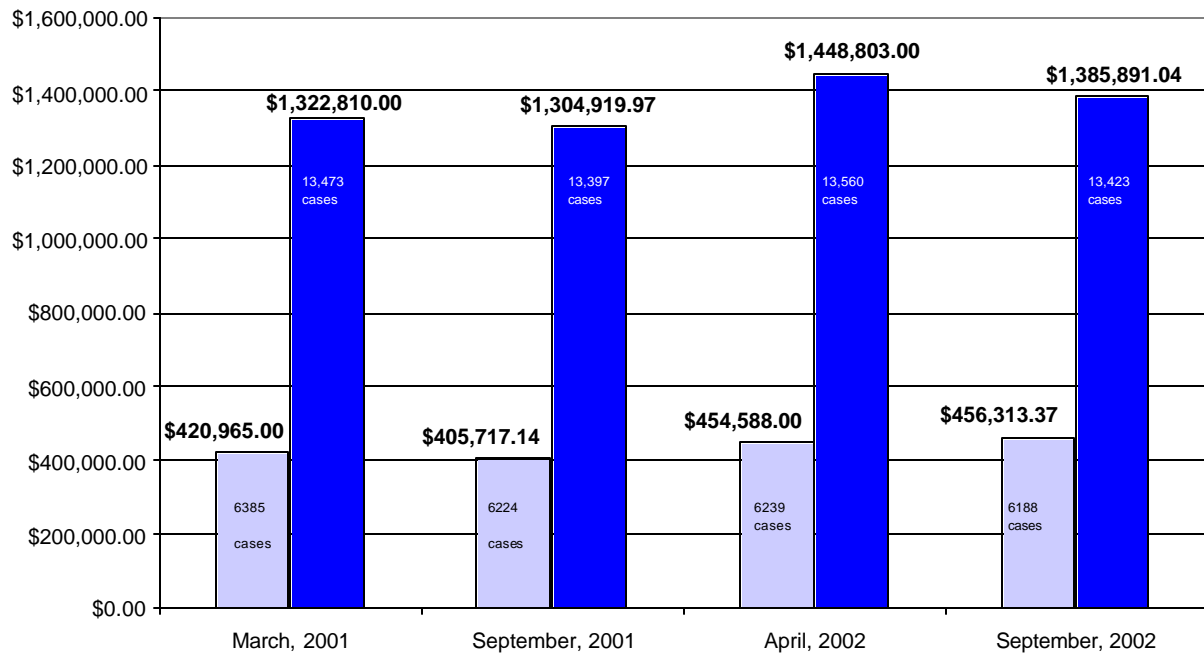
Percentage of Current Support Paid



Hispanic NCPs % of Current Support Paid

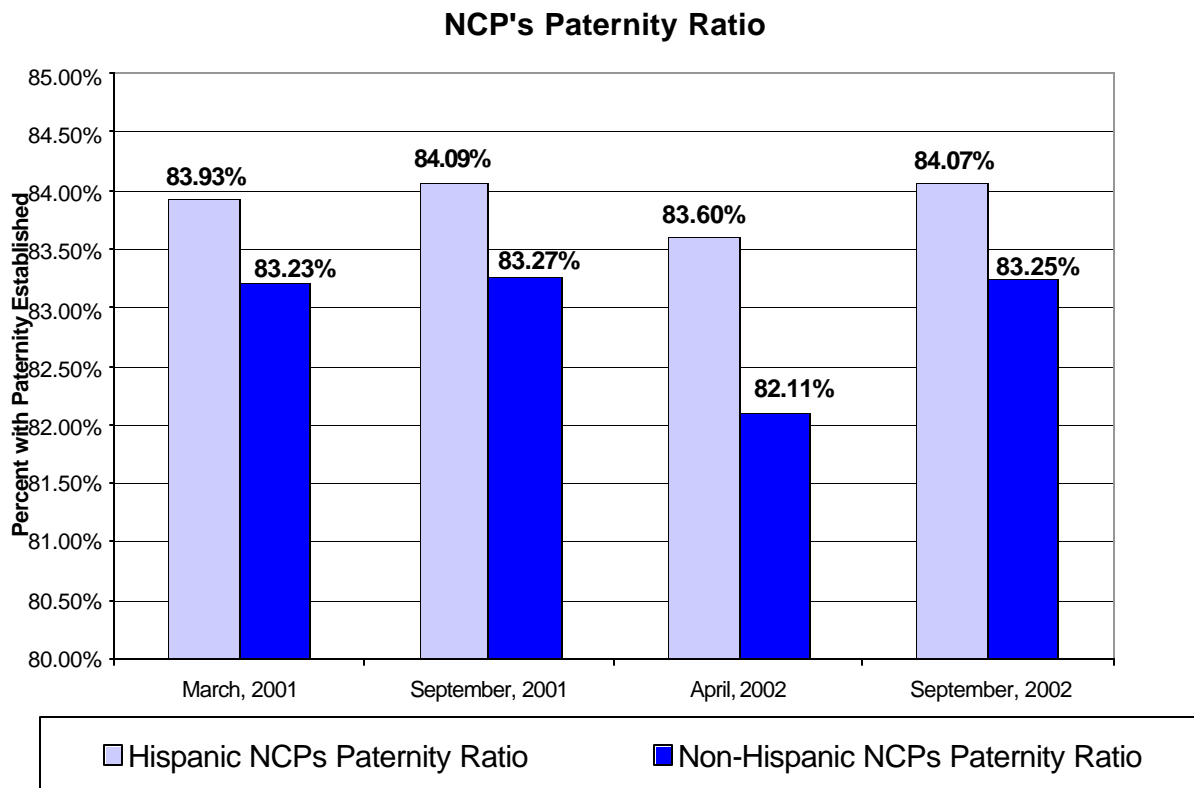
Non-Hispanic NCPs % of Current Support Paid

Total Non-IRS Collections



Hispanic NCPs Total Non-IRS Collections

Non-Hispanic NCPs Total Non-IRS Collections



Family Mediation Referrals

Over the project period thirty-five families were referred by DCS office staff to the local dispute resolution center for assistance with parenting plans and visitation issues. Volunteers made six referrals for family mediation.

Recommendations for Continuation of Hispanic Outreach

At the conclusion of the project, the Madrinas met with Yakima Division of Child Support staff to discuss the outcomes of the project and their recommendations for continuation of outreach to the Hispanic community. They have experienced the following findings.

Positive Results

The Madrinas report that since project implementation, with an increased DCS presence in the community by project staff and the Madrinas, they have observed the following:

- a decrease in fear of DCS services by Hispanic community members.
- an increase in confidence and trust in DCS services and
- increased customer satisfaction with the services they do receive.

Recommendations for Continual Improvement

- Provide ongoing refresher training for community volunteers.
- Distinguish between DCS and financial assistance (WorkFirst) services to reduce stigma attached to using government agencies for assistance.

- Be especially attentive to the issue of illiteracy. Clients often will not admit they are unable to read – prepare materials accordingly and encourage other family members to become resources for those who are illiterate.
- Ensure that employees treat clients with respect and warmth – especially at first contact (reception staff).
- Continue to hand out cards with DCS contact names and phone numbers at community events and in daily interactions with friends, neighbors, co-workers, and clients.

Other significant activities and achievements: This project has been featured in national child support enforcement professional conferences, including presentations by Sylvia Flores, Project Manager, in workshops related to improving customer services for communities with language and diversity issues. State child support programs have requested and been provided with information about the Madrina Project, including Arizona, California, and Texas.

Presentations have also been shared with Department of Social and Health Services staff throughout Washington State. Presentations have been made to the Assistant and Deputy Secretary of Economic Services Administration, Department Directors, and Regional and District Administrators of the State Department of Social and Health Services.

The Madrina Project Coordinator, Sylvia Flores, received two significant awards for her leadership role implementing the project. Mrs. Flores was awarded the Region 2 Partnership Award for the Department of Social and Health Services, and the Department of Social and Health Services Statewide Partnership Award for 2001.

Plan for continuation of project: The Washington State Division of Child Support/DSHS is committed to continuing this successful project by integrating these outreach activities into the daily operations of the Yakima DCS field office. The project coordinator has reassumed her duties as a collection team supervisor; however, 30% of her allotted work time will continue to be focused on outreach to the Hispanic community. A support enforcement officer with a Limited English Proficiency caseload will also devote time to participating in outreach activities.

Additionally, the media educational campaign continues with periodic airing of a Spanish language 30 minute video on the local community cable channel, and discussions by Madrina Project staff and volunteers on live radio talk shows presented by the Yakima Valley Spanish language radio station.

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